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ABSTRACT

This study compared parent and teacher beliefs regarding the relative importance of a set of child care and education tasks, and assessed the degree to which the responsibility for these tasks was perceived to be shared between home and school. The questionnaires of the Perception of Parental Role Scales were administered to three groups of subjects: (1) parents of school-age children in rural settings; (2) parents of preschool children in rural settings; and (3) teachers of school-age and preschool children in rural and urban settings. The instrument consisted of 75 items related to child care and education and represented 13 clusters of child care and education tasks such as those related to cognitive development, emotions, norms and social values, health care, emotional needs, and basic child care. Respondents rated items on the survey for the importance of the task in raising a child, and the locus of responsibility for the task (from almost exclusively parent to almost exclusively school on a 5-point scale). The study revealed statistically significant differences between parents' and teachers' beliefs. Teachers as a group showed little variation on their perceptions of responsibilities but differed from parents in the degree to which they felt parents should have responsibility, particularly in the case of academic learning. (HOD)

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Parental and Teacher Role Perceptions

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Abstract

The differences in perceptions of parental role among parents of preschool and school-age children and teachers were examined in the study. A revised instrument of Perception of Parental Role Scale was used to assess teachers and parents perceptions of educating younger children. The results showed that parents and teachers held different perceptions of responsibility, indicating areas of potential concern in establishing both communication and policy. Family life educators should be aware of the areas of difference as well as understanding what have been defined as areas of responsibility for children.

Parental and Teacher Role Perceptions

The role of parents and teachers in education of young children has been a research focus for parenting research over the past two decades (Sharpe, 1991; Bingner, 1981; Galensky, 1980). Teachers and parents perceive each other's roles differently because each holds its own approach to developmental issues facing young children (Sharpe, 1991; Epstein, 1990). Parents' attitudes and perceptions about raising children affect parental behaviors and in turn, influence children's development (Coleman, Ganong, Clark & Madsen, 1989). The importance of role perceptions centers on the theoretical premise that perceptions occur prior to displayed behavior and therefore have a place in dictating styles and types of interpersonal interaction (Gilbert, 1985; Gilbert & Hanson, 1982). The simultaneous influence of schools (teachers) and families (parents) on children is undeniable, but too often ignored in research and in practice (Epstein, 1990). An understanding of perceptions of parents and teachers may be best understood when the perceptions of these two populations can be analyzed.

Research on parental and teacher roles focuses on two issues: first, the formulation of a clear definition of role perceptions and expectations as opposed to analysis of behavior, and second, the utilization of a reliable instrument which focuses on evaluating a wide variety of perceptions, expectations, and functions of the parent and teacher role as it is commonly defined in today's mainstream culture.

Previous research on parental role has been focused on assessing various dimensions of parenting behaviors (Doescher & Sugawara, 1992; Small & Eastman, 1991, Bigner, 1981; Galinsky, 1980). In related research, parental functioning within family units having a special needs child has been the focus of studies aimed primarily at understanding the adjustment and coping patterns displayed by these parents (Dunlap & Hollingsworth, 1979; Hallahan & Kauffman, 1982). The ability of families to cope with the stresses of having and providing for an exceptional child often depends on how clearly the parental role is defined (Telford & Sawry, 1977). Some studies indicated the ability of families to cope with the stresses and demands of having an exceptional child frequently depend on the availability of professional assistance as well as the nature and degree of the child's exceptionality (Telford & Sawry, 1977).

Sharpe (1991) showed that there were many mixed or misperceptions about roles and expectations among teachers as among parents (Sharpe, 1991). A better understanding of teachers and parents' perceptions on their roles in early child education is important. Sharpe noted that parental perceptions differed from teacher perceptions as a result of parents' naivete of education aims, practices and priorities, a lack of interest, and communication difficulties with teachers (199 . It is believed that parental involvement and teacher sensitivity might lead to more appropriate cooperation, thus roles and responsibilities might become clearer.

However, Epstein (1990) believed that shared responsibilities of families and schools as a set of overlapping spheres of influence could alter the interactions of parents and teachers. Clarification of the goals of both groups (parents and teachers) appears a critical issue in designing comparable relationships and delivering of educational services to children.

Current Investigation

The purpose of the present study was to assess parental role expectations among parents and teachers. The investigation compared parent and teacher beliefs regarding the relative importance of a set of child-care tasks, and to what degree the responsibility for these tasks was perceived to be shared between home and school. Differences in perceptions of parental role among parents of preschool and school-age children and teachers were examined. It was hypothesized that:

"Parent and teacher perceptions would differ regarding the importance and locus of responsibility for various child rearing tasks based on age of target child (preschool vs. school age)."

The study utilized a revised scale of parental role responsibilities based on the "Perceptions of Parental Role Scales" created by Gilbert and Hanson in 1983. Gilbert & Hanson developed a "Perceptions of Parental Role Scale" to measure the parental and teachers' perceptions. The scale has been most widely used with intact family systems and those with upper middle class socioeconomic status. It was deemed valuable for the present research endeavor to assess a range of families with

children of the preschool and school age children. The present study utilized the modification of Gilbert and Hanson scale to assess teacher perceptions of the identical factors being rated by parents. The revised instrument expanded the range of the scale's usage and furthered the proof of the scale's reliability and validity (Gougeon, 1987). Using a factor analysis, Gougeon found that the new version of parental role scale holds a high degree of replicability to Gilbert's Parental Role scale in terms of measuring responsibility shared between school and home.

The subjects consisted of the following: parents and teachers of school age and preschool aged children residing in both urban and rural areas in Washington State. The parents were grouped according to the age of the "target" child with age groupings were based on traditional categorizations used for public school placement and also reflect findings in the literature which note that parental roles vary with the specific age of the child.

In data collection, the questionnaires of Parental Role Scales were administered to three groups:

1. parents of normal, rural school-age children (n=73);

2. parents of normal, rural pre-school children (n=32); and

3. teachers of school age and preschool age children in both rural and urban settings (n=86).

The "perceptions of Parental Role Scales" instrument consisted of 75 items related to child care and education. The 75 items represented 13 clusters of child-care tasks:

1. Teaching cognitive development; representative items included "helping child learn to write well" and "helping child learn to read";

2. Teaching handling of emotions; representative items included "teaching child how to be loving" and "helping child learn about feelings";

3. Teaching social skills; representative items included "teaching child how to cooperate and get along with other children and close friends" and "teaching child how to get along with others";

4. Teaching norms and social values; representative items included "teaching child to be honest and tell the truth" and "teaching child the "rules of society";

5. Teaching physical health; representative items including "teaching child to be a good sport" and "showing child how to play basic sports";

6. Teaching personal hygiene; representative items included "teaching child to brush teeth" and "making sure child bathes regularly";

7. Teaching survival skills; representative items included "showing child how to use phone and dial emergency telephone numbers" and "helping child learn to deal with loss and sadness";

8. Providing health care; representative items included "making sure child sees doctor" and "arranging for child to see dentist for routine check-up";

9. Providing material needs; representative items included

"teaching child to fix simple meals";

10. Meeting emotional needs; representative items included "providing emotional support for child" and "comforting child when upset or afraid";

11. Providing basic child care; representative items included "paying attention to child" and "taking care of child who gets sick at school";

12. Acting as interface between child and social institutions; representative items included "encouraging child to have pride in community"; and

13. Acting as interface between child and the family; representative items included "helping child to have a sense of responsibility to the family" and "teaching child to value family life".

For each item on the survey, the respondent is asked to make two ratings. First, on a five-point scale, the respondent rates the importance of the task in raising a child. Second, also on a five-point scale, the respondent rates the locus of responsibility for the task from "almost exclusively parent" to "almost exclusively school." In statistical analysis, the study used one-way ANOVA to test the demographic group differences and where significant F ratios occurred, Tukey's HSD test was used to identify differing groups.

Results

Clusters Reflecting Importance of Tasks

The results showed that the groups (teachers vs. Parents)

differed significa..tly in the ratings on two clusters: (1) the importance of "meeting the emotional needs of the child," the parents of normal, school-age children differed from teachers, as teachers ascribed more importance to the task than the parent group ($p<0.05$). (2) the importance of the "interface role" between the child and the family (i.e. promoting the child's sense of membership in and responsibility to the family), the parents of school-age children assigning greater importance than teachers ($p<0.05$).

The two significant findings can be explained in this way. Teachers perceive that children, in general, exhibit emotional needs in school that are not being fully met at home and thus would rate this child-care task more highly. Likewise, it seems plausible that parents of school-age children, who may experience more complex behavioral difficulties than of younger children at both school and home, would see a greater need for (i.e. parents) to act in an interface role between school and family.

Clusters Reflecting Responsibility for Tasks

The ratings of responsibility for various child-care tasks differ significantly for most of the clusters. Five out of the thirteen clusters do not exhibit differences. These were: "responsibility for teaching physical health"; "responsibility for teaching survival skills"; "responsibility for providing material needs"; "responsibility for interface:child and family" and "responsibility for interface role between child and social institutions." Taken as a whole, however, these results as to the

importance of various child-care tasks indicate little disagreement among parents and teachers, with all groups rating each task as highly important. The eight remaining clusters exhibit significant differences between groups. In each of the eight clusters, two groups that differ are parents of school-age children and teachers of school-age children. And in each of the clusters, teachers ascribe greater responsibility to the school than do the parents. These clusters and their F values were: teaching cognitive development(F=0.0021), teaching handling emotions(F=0.0000), teaching social skills(F=0.0130), teaching norms and social values(F=0.0121), teaching personal hygiene(F=0.0029), providing health care(F=0.0001), meeting emotional needs(0.0000), and providing child care(F=0.0000). In five of the eight clusters, two additional differing groups are parents of pre-school children and teachers of preschool children, with teachers ascribing greater responsibilities to the school for clusters titled: teaching cognitive development, teaching handling emotions, providing health care, meeting emotional needs and providing child care.

As overview of these results as to responsibility ratings suggests a consistent pattern between groups. This pattern may be best described as different perceptions of responsibility of educating young children between teachers of preschool children and parents of pre-school and school-age children.

Summary

The study revealed statistically significant differences

between parents and teachers, and in two cases, between parents of preschool aged children and teachers. Areas of difference (with parents and teachers ascribing different degrees of responsibility) occurred in the areas of supporting children in socialization, self care, and personal values. Teachers as a group showed little variation on their perceptions of responsibilities (i.e. are items considered to be important) but did differ from parents in the degree to which they felt parents should have responsibility particularly in the factor of academic learning.

Differences between the perceptions of responsibility between these two groups indicate areas of potential concern in establishing both communication and policy.

Results of this research emphasize what is best described by Epstein (1990) as issues relating to overlapping spheres of influence. Within these spheres both parents and teachers emphasize specialization of skills resulting in a natural division of labor. With such specialization in educating and rearing children, Epstein notes that the spheres of influence (school vs. family) pull apart, decreasing the connections between parents and school, and restricting interactions and subsequent understanding. The present study does indicate some discrepancies between the two groups as to "who is supposed to do what." The proposed solution for such simultaneously occurring overlapping and exclusionary areas of responsibility is the nation of "shared responsibilities" for childrens' life and

education within a community context (Epstein).

It is proposed the most vital link between parents and schools is the teacher. More specifically on inclusionary perspective to involve parents not just to be physically present within the school environment but to enable them to participate as resources for learning both what to assist that in learning and how to implement such practices. In turn parents may then be considered the specialists in linking individual families' cultures with the school structure.

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